



Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education

Volume 2

pps. 56-60
DOI: 10.17077/2326-7070.1047

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Recommended Citation

Fetter, Dian. "Heideggerian Ontology: A Philosophic Base for Arts and Humanties Education." *Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education* 2 (1983): 56-60.

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HEIDEGGERIAN ONTOLOGY:
A PHILOSOPHIC BASE FOR ARTS AND HUMANITIES EDUCATION

Dian Fetter

On the Import of Philosophic Presuppositions

In a very originaive sense, though their specific modes of realization differ, each particular metaphysical system [or model] has traditionally sought to explicate and similarly understand man's being by abstracting his essence from the ontic order or "world" structure it [the system] projects -- precisely, in terms of entities, or the totality of entities [beings]¹. In sum, human "being" has been determined, categorized, defined according to - and necessarily made to fit - the already [or pre-] determined postulate and interpretation of "nature" and its ground. From this basis each philosophic position or system suggests and necessarily yields, in respective accordance to its primary postulates, a different set of educational practices - as well as aesthetic theories similarly derivative of their, respectively, pre-established ontic orders. Such concepts and theories then do not spring essentially from man's experience or existential condition, nor the consideration thereof - but from the abstract system which is both their definition and their source. They are, as such, and in all cases, fundamentally prescriptive. By extension, they must necessarily, logically, function [practice] in like manner. In consequence, the converse follows evidently - that is - underlying each educational judgement, attitude, practice, etc., there is a realized or unrealized metaphysical/philosophic assumption which further supports broad practical and theoretic implications.

It is precisely these issues that inhere in the realization that all theories of art, art criticism and arts education-in accordance with their tenents-presuppose a certain conception of man and the world in which he lives.²

In sum, the relationship between philosophy and education is irrefutable; (1) in that one's conception of education is grounded in, thus formulated by a particular philosophic orientation; (2) in that one's conception of what education is, what art is, as well as what man is, determines how and what one is going to teach; and (3) in that the former are contingent on the latter more fundamental distinction and conception, i.e. what human being is.

Precisely because [as exemplified] there is a direct relationship between theories and presumptions of what human nature is, to be pedagogical considerations it thereby subsumes, I believe that arts/humanities/education, if it is to found a pervasive, working alternative to the technological construct and mentality must distinguish, philosophically, its own ground.

If this alternative position is to reverse the negation of individual meaning, it must explicate the conditions and limitations of the objective

perspective and scientific world-interpretation - and lay open the image of man locked in its dimension.

If it is to eradicate the inherently deprecatative position assumed in the designation of so-called "subjective" realms, it must transcend the traditional metaphysical subject-object dichotomy wherein these realms of experience are accordingly discounted, use-less in their status as unstable truths and isolated relativism. Most importantly, their being reduced to those compromises we have not only ignominiously accepted but espoused - i.e. self expression and freedom of the will.

If then art is to retain import, justified existence, in a world determined by metaphysically conditioned concepts of man, by the concept of labor and the power of technology, its relevance must be circumscribed in a manner which apprises these circumstances, and recognizes its [arts] own distinction as a fundamental source of explication; i.e. of man's relationship to world - how and what it means to be.

But this then transcends the boundaries of traditional aesthetics, its predicates and conditioning. That is, traditional theories of art, aesthetics and art criticism are similarly grounded in, determined by and subordinate to, metaphysical convention and its corre;atove conceptions of truth; all respectively functioning in relation to, and in determination of, the work of art. In sum, predicated by the self-delineated and delineating schemata resident in each philosophic orientation, the nature of art and inquiry in regard to it, founds its thus derivative form, means and conceptual ediface. "Application" is similarly wrought, education proceeds accordingly.

Therefore, as it pertains to the disclosure and elucidation of the origination of these boundaries, we thus call to question the traditional aesthetic-theoretic ediface as it has evolved out of the history of metaphysics, most especially in its inability to circumscribe the essential significance of the work of art for the disclosure of truth; what the work of art is in truth. If we then further qualify its basic inability to do so through its determination of the truth of a work as a correctness that can be gauged by the criterion of objectivity, we come, subsequently, to the original paradoxes which attach to any ontology that takes its orientation from thingly reality - as aesthetic theory does.

There are then three traditional prescriptions as to what makes a thing a thing. Ironically, in our analysis of these positions, it becomes evident that traditional philosophic thought is unable to answer the question as to what makes a thing a thing, and cannot, in any of its forms thus serve as a guide to understanding the work of art. Yet it is to one of these schemata that indeed traditional aesthetics applies whenever there is question of such understanding. It is accordingly that the [cited] establishment and delineation of the work of art by means of its "thingly" character, in all cases thus subsumes the art work as "object" in theoretic determination. Truth so postulated refers then to the theoretic, idealational truth of propositional assertion and representation. Its locus is thus necessarily relegated to judgement and defined by the criterion of objectivity.

Dian Fetter 57

Yet, in isolation of its constitutive factors, we find that this correspondence theory of truth utilized by aesthetic theory fails to accommodate the "what is" of truth in art. More widely conclusive, is that its origins in the categorical delineation of things, compounded historically within the structure of meta-physical conditions, thus correlates with the predominance of technocracy, and the scientific, dichotomized "World-view." Most profoundly, that this scientific, objective and thus, aesthetic truth is not an original incarnation of truth, but merely the elaboration of an already overt realm: it is thus, and in all cases, ontic and not ontological.

What must follow from these conclusions? Precisely, that the nature of art abides in a dimension disregarded by traditional aesthetics and ontology, that the specific nature of artistic and poetic truth has not therein been disclosed, that it lies then, not in traditionally determined aesthetic, but [newly conceived] ontological, reflection.

Propositions and Intents

The commitment which is thus central to my work is the theoretic expostulation of hermeneutics as the philosophic basis of education in the arts and humanities; which takes, in accordance with the Heideggerian tradition [its originative source of inquiry], its position in the life world. Its rationale is thus propounded: man's being in the world, supporting ontological discourse into the realm of art and its educational dimensions. By extension, art becomes irrevocably bound to the human historical-experiential core, its modes of unification. So designated, it projects as basic proposition, that that which comes to expression in the work of art is the possibilities resident in Being. More precisely, that the art work is not primarily aesthetic but ontological; and, that there is continuity between the self-understanding potentially attained from the work of art and the self-understanding in and through which we live. The working of the work is thus synonymous to the disclosure of human possibility.

If to the above, one adds the realization that Heidegger's position and intent accomplishes and encompasses the move beyond traditional metaphysics, that what forms and transforms the Heideggerian perspective is the continuity of question as regards the relationship of Being and man, that Heidegger consistently over-comes static categories in designation of the historic or event character of Being: that the former [categories] are those in which we are not only disposed to think but live: we come then to understand that in such 'overcoming,' Heidegger offers us a more authentic mode of being. It follows from the core of meaning and human significance within its circumference, from its ground already present in the human situation, the consequence of hermeneutic as theoretic foundation relevant to education in the arts and humanities is thus preordained. In sum, we are being concerned with our own meaning. It is for the "humanities" to explicate and articulate what science cannot: man's relationship to Being: How and what it means, to be.

Philosophic Ground and Foundation of the Study

Instructive to the present purpose, it becomes necessary to note that the phenomenology of Husserl and the phenomenological hermeneutics of Heidegger are significantly different. Husserl emphasized the rigor of a presuppositionless philosophy, which, by means of the epoche, bracketed out the naive attitude and the empirical ego. In turn, he posited the transcendental subjectivity, the transcendental conscious, functioning as the basis of analysis and description of essences, and thus, absolute subjectivity as the source of meaning; the transcendental conscious, thus constituting meaning, becomes the source of apodictic evidence and the ultimate justification of theoretic knowledge. Significantly, in Husserl's work, consciousness = Being.

Conversely, Heidegger begins not in the realm of pure consciousness and transcendental subjectivity, but in the radical temporality of man and world; the facticity of being as more fundamental than human consciousness or human knowledge; man's life and the world as essentially historic and finite; being in the world as the source of man's understanding.

Specific to these fundamental distinctions and the purpose of choice, it is thereby instructive to note that for Husserl "knowing" the Lebenswelt, as lifeworld, necessitates doing so theoretically - i.e. thus not originating from the historical-experiential dimension of the Lebenswelt itself, but from the transcendental vantage point. In this request, his presuppositionless position negates, via a process of reduction, the historicity of man's understanding within the finite, historic world.

In consequence, the phenomenological method formalized by Husserl, is rethought in the Heideggerian purpose and perspective - not toward a laying open of consciousness, but as a means of disclosing Being in its facticity and historicity. The hermeneutic dimension is conceived philosophically, as synonomous to philosophy itself; thus the basis of accounting for man's understanding not as subjective processes, but as our essential way of being. This, the hermeneutic element in Heidegger's phenomenology, distinguishes a decisive thrust from the world of Husserl.

Deferring the particulars of Heideggerian thought within its structure and development, the thus cited work has sought to acknowledge its derivation from this revolutionary source, nucleus, and referential necessity - its foundation in the Heideggerian tradition.

FOOTNOTES

¹This is the primary concern of Martin Heidegger's criticism of the traditions, which, by virtue of its emphasis on beings is synonomous to the forgetfulness of Being.

²Moreover, it is again these very fundamental issues and conceptions whose status is often accepted as self-evident or "given", or are otherwise unconscious, unexamined assumptions which ask - by virtue of their import to everything that follows from them - for detailed critical reflections. As an evident extension of these considerations, the relevance attached to

our critical knowledge of traditions of thought is again circumscribed, i.e., as giving substance and meaning as well as philosophic clarity to the concepts we hold.